

## Walking in Their Shoes

Orlando VA Uses Virtual Reality Training to Empower Staff to Understand Veteran Experiences

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*(Orlando VA Healthcare System's VR champions providing OVAHCS Medical Center Director Timothy Cooke with a demo of the Moments That Matter program. Left to right: Kayla Patterson, MSN, RN; Amanda Rose, MSN, RN; and Timothy Cooke, Medical Center Director/CEO, Orlando VA Healthcare System. Taken by Roberto Madero)*

The inpatient discharge process is undergoing a paradigm shift as the Orlando VA Healthcare System introduces a virtual reality (VR) pilot program. The VR experience is designed to equip health care professionals with an immersive understanding of Veterans' emotions and obstacles when being discharged from the hospital and further develop empathetic communication.

In March 2023, the Orlando VA Healthcare System was one of ten sites chosen to participate in a VR pilot for the Veteran's Experience Office (VEO). The pilot is named Moments That Matter (MTM), which was developed specifically for VA staff. It highlights barriers and areas for improvement (termed "pain points" by VEO) during the inpatient discharge process. By immersing participants into a simulated hospital environment in the Veteran perspective using VR technology, staff gained valuable insight into the emotions that Veterans experience when the discharge process does not proceed as expected.

The Orlando pilot team provided this program to 39 staff members from various disciplines, including nursing, pharmacy, occupational therapy, medical residents and social work. Overall, participants responded positively to the experience, and engaged in reflection on how this experience can improve

their clinical practice. The greatest takeaways were improving communication and empathy for Veterans' feelings. The following quotes came directly from participants during the debrief:

- "It gives people a really good idea and perspective of what it feels like to be a patient."
- "Really helpful to see it from the patient's side. As a nurse, we sometimes are biased to our perspective. This helped see how easily one can get frustrated."
- "It was a great way to put clinicians inpatient perspectives; we need more scenarios that make us reflect and be more interactive inpatient care. Providers should also have this training."
- "(You) get more with a patient's views on things that you might not normally notice and be more mindful. The small things that are important to your patients should also be important to you."

Richard Henriquez, MD, site director for the Internal Medicine Residency program at the Orlando VA Healthcare System, stated, "experiencing the Virtual Reality Inpatient Discharge Training highlights the importance of the Veteran experience and perspective. Integrating VR into their medical training will have extreme benefits. For example, VR will improve the quality of medical education residents receive and allow them to experience scenarios in a safe yet fun environment so they can become more prepared and confident when faced with day-to-day patient challenges."

Orlando's experience was reflected in the feedback from other pilot sites. Of the 318 participants across ten sites, 67% of them completed the pilot evaluation survey. Of those, a majority of survey respondents would recommend the training to a colleague; 93% reported the training helped them experience empathy for Veterans going through the discharge process; and 90% said the training will positively impact how they engage with Veterans during the discharge journey.

Although the pilot has ended, Orlando plans to continue to utilize MTM headsets to further develop empathetic communication for inpatient staff.